



2009 Fact Sheet



Big Bend National Park was authorized by Congress in 1935 to preserve and protect a representative area of the Chihuahuan Desert along the Rio Grande for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The park includes rich biological and geological diversity, cultural history, recreational resources, and outstanding opportunities for bi-national protection of our shared natural and cultural heritage.

Overview

Park Purpose

Big Bend National Park's purpose is threefold:

- Preserve and protect all natural and national register-eligible cultural resources and values.
- Provide educational opportunities to foster understanding and appreciation of the natural and human history of the region.
- Provide recreational opportunities for diverse groups that are compatible with the protection and appreciation of park resources.

Establishment

Established as Texas Canyons State Park in May 1933; name changed to Big Bend State Park, October 1933; authorized by Congress as a National Park in 1935; established as a National Park on June 12, 1944.

Name

The Big Bend area of Texas derives its name from its location on the bend of the Rio Grande. The river creates a natural border that separates the United States from Mexico.

Park Significance

The park is significant because it contains the most representative example of the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem in the United States. The park's river, desert, and mountain environments support an extraordinary richness of biological diversity, including endemic plants and animals, and provide unparalleled recreation opportunities. The geologic features and Cretaceous and Tertiary fossils in Big Bend National Park create opportunities to study the sedimentary and igneous processes. Archeological and historic resources provide examples of cultural interaction in the Big Bend Region and varied ways humans adapted to the desert and river environments. The Rio Grande is life-sustaining for plants, animals, and human inhabitants beyond its banks. Along with the two Mexican protected areas for flora and fauna, Maderas del Carmen and Cañon de Santa Elena, Big Bend is now part of one of the largest transboundary protected areas in North America. More than two million acres of Chihuahuan Desert resources, along with more than 200 miles of river, are now under the national protection of the United States and Mexico. Lastly, it was determined that Big Bend's remoteness has created conditions for the best night sky viewing in the continental United States.

Staffing

National Park Service

Superintendent William E. Wellman
103 permanent employees
58 seasonal employees

Big Bend Natural History Association

3 permanent employees

Forever Resorts (concessionaire)

32 permanent employees
39 seasonal employees

Volunteers in Parks

241 volunteers contributed 35,075 hours of service to the park in 2008.

Student Conservation Association

7 SCA interns contributed 3,307 hours of service to the park in 2008.

Park Partners

Big Bend Natural History Association

A non-profit organization that supports education, research and other programs for the benefit of Big Bend. Financial aid is provided to the park through the sales of interpretive products. Outlets for these products are located in all park visitor centers.

Friends of Big Bend National Park

A non-profit organization whose mission is to support, promote, and raise funds for Big Bend National Park in partnership with the National Park Service and other supporters who value the unique qualities found in the Big Bend of the Rio Grande.

Natural Resources

Size

801,163 acres (1,252 square miles)
15th largest in the national park system

Elevation

Highest point: Emory Peak; 7,832 feet (2,387 m).
Lowest point: Rio Grande Village; 1,850 feet (564 m).

River Canyons

| | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Santa Elena Canyon | 20 miles (32 km) |
| Mariscal Canyon | 10 miles (16 km) |
| Boquillas Canyon | 33 miles (53 km) |

US/Mexico Border

Shared International Border—118 miles (190 km)
Mexican States bordering the Park—2 states:
Chihuahua & Coahuila

Landmarks and Elevations

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Emory Peak | 7,832 feet (2,387 m). |
| South Rim | 7,375 feet (2,248 m). |
| Casa Grande Peak | 7,325 feet (2,233 m). |
| Chisos Basin | 5,401 feet (1,664 m). |
| Panther Junction | 3,750 feet (1,143 m). |
| Castolon | 2,169 feet (661 m). |
| Rio Grande Village | 1,850 feet (564 m). |

Climate and Weather

Fall and spring are usually warm and pleasant. Summers are hot, although temperatures vary greatly between the desert floor and the Chisos Mountains; May and June are the hottest months. Afternoon and evening rains often cool the desert from July to October. Winters are generally mild, although periods of cold weather (including light snow) are possible.

Flora and Fauna

1,295 species of flora
75 species mammals
450+ species birds
56 species reptiles
11 species amphibians
38 species fish

Major Resource Issues:

Air Quality/Visibility
Rio Grande Water Quality & Quantity
Exotic Species
Theft of Park Resources

Cultural Resources

Human History

Evidence of nearly 12,000 years of human occupation by Paleo-Indian, archaic peoples and a variety of southwestern tribes, including the Chisos, Jumano, Mescalero Apache, and Comanche. Around 1870 ranchers began to migrate to the Big Bend, and by 1900 ranchers, miners and farmers occupied the area.

Collection Summary

Archeological objects systematically recovered from within the park's boundaries and associated field records; historic objects related to the park's history; herbarium and associated field records; other biological specimens; geological and paleontological specimens.

Cataloged Museum Objects

287,342

Archeological Resources

Nearly 2,340 sites (8% of park surveyed to date)

National Register of Historic Places

There are eight National Register of Historic Places sites or districts in Big Bend National Park. They are Burro Mesa Archeological District, Castolon Historic District, Hot Springs Historic District, the Mariscal Mining District, the Homer Wilson Blue Creek Ranch Site, Rancho Estelle, Daniel's Farmhouse and Luna's Jacal.

Visitor Services and Resource Protection

Visitation

364,876 visitors in 2008. Highest visitation in the park's history was 400,945 in 2005; lowest was 1,409 visitors in 1944.

Frontcountry Camping

Chisos Basin Campground: 63 sites
Cottonwood Campground: 31 sites
Rio Grande Village Campground: 100 sites
Rio Grande Village RV Park (hookups): 25 sites

Picnic Areas

7 (Dugout Wells, Daniels Ranch, Castolon, Cottonwood campground, Chisos Basin, Persimmon Gap, and Santa Elena Canyon)

Backcountry Camping

Backcountry Campsites : 116
Includes both High Chisos and primitive roadside designated campsites.

Backcountry Use

Overnight Backpacking Permits: 1,859
Backcountry Roadside Permits: 2,162
River Use Permits: 751

Hiking trails

201 miles

Roads

304 total miles (Paved and gravel)
123 miles of paved roads
45 miles of improved unpaved roads
136 miles of primitive unpaved roads

Concessionaire

Foverever Resorts operates the Chisos Mountains Lodge (72 rooms in motel units and four historic cottages), camper stores at three locations and gas stations at Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village.

Visitor Protection

Search and Rescue: 24 incidents
Motor Vehicle Accidents: 26
Emergency Medical Incidents: 114
Fatalities: 3

Interpretation and Education

Programs: 635 programs presented to 10,570 visitors
Educational Outreach: 12 programs to 250 students
Junior Ranger Program: 1,095 participants

Notable Event of 2008

In September, the park experienced the largest flood in the park's recorded history due to a combination of high monsoon moisture and the dispersal of tropical storm Lowell in the Rio Conchos watershed.

The cover shot on the front page of the Fact Sheet is the inundated pumphouse at Daniels Ranch near Rio Grande Village.